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SUBJECT: OIL SPILL EXPERT VISITS FINLAND

¶1. (U) Embassy Helsinki organized a two-day visit by Dr. John Devens, Executive Director of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (PWSRCAC), on May 18-19, 2007. Dr. Devens was Mayor of Valdez, Alaska during the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill. One of the first NGOs of its kind, the PWSRCAC was created to provide citizens a voice in the regional decisions of the oil industry and to reduce pollution from oil transportation in the region.

¶2. (U) Due to the rapid rise in oil transportation in the Baltic Sea, oil spill prevention has emerged as a very visible issue for Finnish citizens; the GoF lists it as one of its top emergency response concerns. Events during Dr. Devens' visit included a visit to the Baltic Sea Traffic Coordination Center in Helsinki, followed by a seminar on combating oil spills organized by the US Embassy, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, and WWF Finland. Dr. Devens delivered the keynote address during the seminar which reached 150 people interested in preparing for and preventing oil spills in the Baltic Sea. Dr. Devens was also interviewed by numerous journalists, garnering extensive print, television, and radio coverage in both Finnish and Swedish.

¶3. (U) Dr. Devens was also the guest of honor at a dinner hosted by the Deputy Chief of Mission; dinner participants included many of the leading Finnish government and transportation security experts, as well as Risto Volanen, State Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office. On the second day of his visit, Dr. Devens spoke to approximately 60 volunteers outside of Helsinki at a mock oil clean-up exercise organized by NGO WWF Finland. The participants were very interested in Dr. Devens' first-hand experiences and his thoughts on proper training and advance preparation in combating oil spills.

¶4. (U) Dr. Devens was very effective at communicating his message to each target audience. His experience as Mayor of Valdez during a severe crisis made it easy for him to sympathize with the concerns and challenges faced by GoF authorities and non-governmental organizations preparing to deal with the consequences of a significant spill in the Baltic Sea. Dr. Devens also participated in an extensive program organized by Embassy Tallinn,

further highlighting this serious regional challenge.

15. (U) Result: Dr. Devens' visit successfully raised awareness about oil spill prevention in the sensitive Baltic Sea region and it resulted in favorable local press coverage and goodwill for the Embassy, especially on the environmental front. Dr. Devens was able to interact with a wide cross section of Finnish society including government officials, academics, journalists, business contacts and interested citizens. The immediate feedback from participants was very positive, resulting in many fresh ideas and practical guidance for planning and preparing for an oil spill. Coming from a NGO background, Dr. Devens shared clear examples on synergistic collaboration between government, NGOs and private corporations.

16. (U) Post thanks IIP for excellent support in bringing Dr. Devens to Finland. We look forward to working further with IIP to schedule other speakers in the future.

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